

Lifestyle Wedding

Chapter Three

Kallidora Rho

The sound of wedding bells echoed through the old church and Amara Rodriguez's empty head. It was a beautiful ceremony. Aleksandra and Helena Adams had brought all of their considerable wealth to bear on the occasion, occupying a small but historic church in the heart of the city and filling it with lavish decorations, a bouquet of carefully-selected, trustworthy guests from among friends and family, and a small army of loyal, brainwashed servants. No detail was left unplanned, no want unmet; Lucy Grace Song, in the guise of event planner, had seen to that. It was a perfect wedding, crowned, above all, by the moment Mel Adams and her bride, Emma Park, joined hands before the altar and the priest to exchange vows, rings, and a kiss that would join them for a lifetime. All in attendance watched with rapt attention and tears in their eyes—but few more so than Amara.

After all, it was the first day since her rebirth that she had been permitted to set eyes on Mel Adams, her owner and master, in the flesh.

From the back of the church, of course. Never inclined to let talent go to waste, the Adamses had made her part of the security detail. But everything was running smoothly, leaving Amara free to watch worshipfully from the wings as the focal point of her new existence stood at the altar to await her beloved. Mel looked breathtaking in her tailored tuxedo. Confident and handsome, embodying all of her mothers' best traits. When Emma appeared to walk the aisle, the look of absolute, dim-witted adoration the brainwashed bride wore matched perfectly the one on Amara's own face.

She was not jealous. Jealousy, like so many other things, had been utterly bleached from Amara's mind. It merely brought her the utmost joy to see Mel so happy, and wedded to such a suitable companion. It was a testament to Mel's superiority and power, just like the fact that she had Vivienne Gilbert, a former rising star CEO and master hypnotist, serving as a bimbofied, empty-

headed bridesmaid. All Amara wanted—all she was capable of wanting—was to see Mel happy. She worshiped Mel Adams. She served Mel Adams. She knew that with all her heart, and she knew little else besides.

Hierarchy and supremacy were the way the world worked. What could Amara feel but gratitude at having finally been shown her proper place and proper master?

Amara's service did not end with the ceremony. Afterwards, it was her pleasure to watch over the reception, too—but at the appointed time, she stepped away and retired to one of the church's dusty storerooms, set aside for the purpose by Helena and Aleksandra. There, she took her time removing each item of her clothing before carefully folding them and hanging them up on one of the many racks of clothing Mel's parents had arranged. Once naked, she knelt on the hard, stone ground facing the door, legs apart, back straight, palms rested upturned on knees. And then, she simply waited. The old stone ground pressed uncomfortably against her bare skin. The cold air of the church storehouse raised goosebumps up and down her spine. The wait was long enough that even her meticulously-conditioned body began to ache and groan from the strain of holding the pose—but Amara did not move or complain.

Her strong body was for service. Her weak mind needed to obey.

When the sound of an approaching voice reached Amara's ears, it stirred more reverent awe than any church hymn. Even muffled by the heavy, wooden door, she recognized it. The voice had been drilled deep into her mind through countless hours of subliminal training. Amara's growing excitement doubled when the door slowly swung open, revealing, at long last, her owner. Finally, Amara could offer her submission in the flesh. She could scarcely imagine a greater honor—but one had already been bestowed upon her.

She was to be Mel Adams's wedding gift.

"Mother, Mom!" Mel complained good-naturedly as she entered the storeroom, accompanied by her mothers and her new wife. "Did you really need to drag us away from the reception like this? What kind of present needs to be stowed all the way back here and given in priv—" As she set eyes on Amara, she cut herself off, and her eyes narrowed with muted suspicion. "Oh. What is she doing here?"

There was no reply. Aleksandra and Helena, both dressed to the nines, simply watched with gleeful expressions as the penny dropped, and recognition dawned on Mel's face.

"Oh!" Mel repeated, shocked. "Oh."

“Surprise!” Helena burst out, gesturing excitedly with her hands. “We hope you like her!”

“Indeed,” Aleksandra added wryly. “Not quite a Dutch oven or a stand mixer, but we think you’ll find her extremely useful.”

“Uh, thanks,” Mel offered warily. “But... her? Really? And what do you mean, she’s a present?”

Still patient, still silent, Amara found her submissive calm rocked, ever so slightly, by Mel’s less-than-enthusiastic response. Amara wanted nothing more than to throw herself at Mel’s feet. To beg for forgiveness, and for the opportunity to please. Her excitement for this very moment had been building for days, and was now all but overwhelming. Even now, the grin on her face was that of a giddy, stupid, overeager puppy. It pained her to think that, as a gift, she might prove displeasing.

She comforted herself with the thought that, in the end, Mel knew best, and Amara didn’t need to know anything at all.

“Who better?” Aleksandra replied smoothly. “She’s very good, you know. Even after our handiwork.”

Mel’s eyes widened slightly. She looked closely at Amara for a moment, and a slight thrill passed over her face. “What did you do to her?”

“We made her yours, darling,” Helena answered proudly. “Through and through. This isn’t the same woman you hired to deal with Emma. She barely has a thought left in her head besides serving you—and besides all of the know-how she’ll need to do it.”

Hearing herself described that way might have stirred some final remnant of pride or resentment within Amara. Instead, she merely let slip a happy giggle. Mel shivered slightly at the sound, but did not fail to notice what her mother was hinting at.

“Know-how?” Mel pressed. “Just what exactly is she... for?”

“You know our Lucy,” Aleksandra stepped in smoothly. “You know what she does for us. It’s simple: Amara here will be your Lucy.”

“My...” Mel shivered again—visibly from discomfort rather than excitement. “Mom, you know I still haven’t made up my mind about things like that. I’m still...”

“We know,” Helena assured her, resting a gentle hand on her daughter’s shoulder. “And we know you want to do things a little differently from our generation. I promise, you have our full support. We don’t want our little girl to have to get her hands dirty the same way we did.”

“But,” Aleksandra picked up effortlessly, “the world isn’t always quite so kind. We don’t want you to run afoul of any sharks who smell blood in the water. By all means, do things your way—but do them properly and carefully, and that means having the right people at your side. The right kind of enforcer.”

Mel was still frowning, and for a moment it seemed that she might protest. But after a few seconds of silent thought, she began to nod her head. “I can change things,” she murmured to herself. “But I need to play the game. Is that it?”

“I’m afraid so, darling,” Helena told her sympathetically.

“Right.” Mel sighed, capitulating to their logic. “But... Amara Rodriguez? Really? After what she did to Emma? I’m not sure I want her around her. I don’t know, it just...”

She looked at her new wife and trailed off for a moment, unsure. Emma had been standing with a serene, blissed-out smile on her face throughout the conversation, untroubled by Amara’s presence, but she seemed to take Mel’s comment as a prompt. Slowly, taking care not to ruin her dress, she stepped forward until she was standing directly before the kneeling slave.

“Hi, Amara,” Emma giggled. “It’s been, like, a long time, huh?”

Amara nodded respectfully—strange though it was to her to feel such absolute respect for a woman she had brainwashed, and who was dressed so provocatively. For the ceremony, Mel had seen fit to have Emma wear a white wedding dress, but hardly a conventional one. Specially designed and tailored, it featured all the detail and beauty of a traditional bridal gown, but none of the modesty. All over, it was tight to Emma’s athletic physique and was largely made of sheer lace that left little, if anything, to the imagination. It was a stunning sight. Mel loved showing off her beloved, and Emma loved to be shown off.

But all that mattered to Amara was that she was Mel’s wife. Practically a goddess in her own right, no matter her intelligence.

“Yes,” she answered eventually.

“I totally missed you!” Emma squealed happily. “But don’t worry! I’ve been keeping up with all your exercise tips and sets and stuff.” She struck a little pose, showing off, but then a more contemplative expression dawned on her face, as though she was peering through the cotton candy fluff that now filled her head. “Are you, like, gonna belong to Mel too, from now on?”

Amara shivered with anticipation at the very suggestion. “I hope so.” It was her most fervent wish.

Mel's eyes were fixed upon her bride, waiting on tenterhooks for her reaction. Emma seemed to mull it over for a moment, before smiling and reaching forward to lightly pet Amara's head.

"Yay!" she exclaimed. "That's so nice! I promise, Mel's the best mistress in the whole world."

At that, Mel let out a fond sigh, and the question was settled.

"Alright," Mel conceded, her reluctance rapidly melting away into sincere gratitude. "Mom, Mother, you're right. And... thank you. She's a wonderful present."

Aleksandra and Helena exchanged a look, at once pleased and relieved. Amara, meanwhile, could barely contain herself. Giggles threatened to burst from her lips, and she began to tremble with excitement ever so slightly from her kneeling pose. She was a wonderful present. Nothing had ever made her happier. Helena Adams noticed the slight lapse in her form but didn't chasten her, only rolled her eyes indulgently.

"And you haven't even seen the best part!" Helena laughed. "I told you that she'll be your Lucy, but... well, we all know what you like, sweetheart. We've laid plenty of the groundwork for you. When I said that she has little in her head but serving you, I was not exaggerating. She's just your type."

"Really?" Mel's nostrils flared, and the corners of her lips began turning upward. Her eyes were glowing with interest.

"But we didn't want to rob you of all the fun," added Aleksandra. "We thought you might want to enjoy putting the finishing touches in place yourself. Hence all this!" She gestured at the clothing racks all around them. "Enjoy her—and don't let your sweet old moms take up too much of your time on your wedding day. We should probably head back to the reception and leave you newlyweds to it."

She turned toward the door and reached for Helena's hand, who took it—but then winked provocatively.

"Back to the reception?" she purred. "That's too bad, I was hoping I could get you up to the hotel room already. Weddings always get me in the mood."

While the Adams matriarchs shared a longing look, Mel shuddered and rolled her eyes. But then her parents slipped out of the storeroom and were gone, leaving Mel alone with her new wife and her new pet.

Mel took a long, deep breath. She looked like she was steadying herself. Preparing herself. Amara did the same. If she didn't calm down, she was going to burst from excitement. She was so, so happy to finally be owned.

“My mother said they made you mine,” Mel began thoughtfully. In her wedding suit, Emma dotting on her arm, she was every inch the hypnogarch her mothers had always wanted. “Through and through. What did they mean, exactly?”

Amara existed in a sea of pleasant fog that kept her from thinking of feeling much of anything besides eagerness to serve, but when Mel asked, she found that answers came to her. “I have been brainwashed and conditioned to worship and obey you in all respects,” she recited dreamily. “My trigger phrase is ‘strong body, weak mind.’ You may use it to further condition me to your liking.”

Mel was hanging on her every word. Despite her earlier hesitation, her eyes registered a profound interest. “She also said that they made you just my type,” she remarked, “but you sound intelligent enough.”

“Yes,” Amara replied, dull inside and out. “They ensured I kept all the knowledge and expertise that might be useful to you.”

“Including hypnosis?”

Amara took a moment to feel at the contours of her own, diminished mind. Like any practiced mind controller, she had spent years studying and perfecting her art. Once, she knew, she would have been able to recite theories of trance and discuss the merits of different induction styles. Now, all of that was gone. What remained was more like instinct than knowledge. An ingrained patter and sense of rhythm, an intuition for the mental states and susceptibilities of those around her, a grasp of technique that, more than anything, resembled the kind of muscle memory that served Amara so well at the gym. Losing so much didn’t bother her. This was simply the way she was supposed to be.

“Yes,” she repeated. “I would be glad to hypnotize someone for you, mistress.”

“I see.” Mel leaned in, curious. “And besides that, what else did you keep?”

Amara smiled. “Almost nothing.”

“Interesting.” Mel pursed her lips, then tilted her head. “What’s fourteen times twelve?”

“Fourteen... twelve...” Amara mouthed slowly. It was a struggle merely to keep two numbers in her head. Whereas before, the fog had drawn back in response to Mel’s question, now it closed in all the denser. Amara tried to visualize the numbers. Tried to break them down. Tried to put them together. She frowned. “Um... um... She was getting nowhere. The failure might have bothered her; instead, strangely, it delighted her. She could sense, somehow,

that the question wasn't important, and so, as the numbers slipped hopelessly through her fingers, it tickled the part of her mind that was endlessly and infinitely grateful to have a safe, comfortable place at Mel's right hand. An absent giggle passed her lips. Then another, then another, and as she relaxed into the warm, blissful feeling of reward that rushed to claim her, the answer simply popped into her head. "Like, twenty-six?"

Emma nodded in agreement, but Mel was struggling to stifle a giggle of her own. "I see," she commented dryly. "Very good, Amara."

The praise made Amara grin and tremble again. She was overjoyed to be pleasing to her owner—and behind Mel's words, she could sense a growing fascination and hunger. Her ditzzy giggles were like a red rag to a bull. Mel, though, was not one to lose control.

"Finishing touches," Mel mused, eyes wandering to the clothing racks filling the storeroom. "My very own customizable Amara Rodriguez." The smile on her face widened. "I think I can get used to that."

"Thank you, mistress!" Amara barked, unable to contain her elation.

"Then let's get started," Mel decided. "Strong body, weak mind."

There was no resistance. None at all. In Mel's presence, Amara was already on the verge of trance. It was the easiest thing in the world to let the words wash over her, a heavy blanket, a warm tide. Amara felt her body firm up in its perfect, submissive pose, becoming the unbending tool of service she had spent years honing herself for. She felt her mind unlock and open, the gossamer-thin defenses that wakefulness afforded her willingly collapsing as she embraced her own weakness, ready for whatever words of command her beloved owner saw fit to pour into her head.

"Strong body," she echoed, her awestruck breath like the rustle of reeds bending to the wind. "Weak mind."

She was blank. She was gone.

Mel and Emma each studied the transformation with care. Mel, surveying a new, fine tool. Emma, savoring vicariously the kind of pleasure and release her wife offered her every single night. "Stand up," Mel instructed after a few moments.

"Yes, mistress." Amara rose to her feet without a single thought. Her strong body thrummed at the opportunity to obey. Her weak mind was silent as she stood at attention, back straight, legs slightly apart, arms at her sides.

"Good," Mel murmured. Her gaze made it plain she was commenting on Amara's body as much as her responsiveness. "Very good."

She took a step forward and pressed her palm to Amara's abs, tense and bared. Amara shivered slightly, the contact sending thrilling shocks across her skin, but she did not move. In trance, even the excitement of her owner touching her was muted. Mel's hand began to move, fingers tracing the lines of Amara's abs, then up to her biceps and her pecs, then down all the way to her firm, chiseled thighs. It was like she was savoring a new flavor; Amara knew that, thanks to her, Emma took meticulous care of her body. She was, after all, something of an exercise bimbo influencer. But Emma erred on the side of trim and toned, and Vivienne Gilbert—Vivi—was classically curvy, while Amara was a lifelong gym rat with years of gains to boast of. Mel was evidently enjoying the contrast. As she explored Amara's physique, her touch grew steadily bolder and more avaricious; in minutes, she had evolved from caressing a new lover's body to groping a piece of property.

Eventually, her hand reached Amara's inner thighs, and strayed upward from there to cup the brainwashed woman's cunt. The sensation of Mel's practiced fingertips stroking against Amara conjured a physical response, and she started to drip wetness onto her owner's skin. But still, she did not moan, and did not move a muscle.

Strong body, weak mind. It was her mantra. It was her whole world.

"My mothers truly did a thorough job on you," Mel admired. "Just like you did with my Emma." Amara nodded; Emma, watching, giggled. "How do you feel about that?"

"I... um..." As before, Amara found herself foggy and bereft of insight. Mel's touch was bliss. That was all that mattered.

"You turned my Emma from a brave journalist into a dumb little exercise bimbo." Now, a hint of something vindictive was beginning to show in Mel's voice, even though all of them knew what she was describing had been at her own behest. She was staring into Amara's eyes, testing, perhaps hoping, for some glint of regret or resentment. "And now the same thing's happened to you. How does that make you feel, Amara?"

"Um..." Resentment was the very last thing Amara was capable of feeling. Her mind had been utterly rewritten, and those impulses utterly redirected. Any bitterness she might have felt was transmuted into gratitude by the unquestionable truths that had been stamped into her brain. This was the way the world worked. She once showed Emma her place, and now she had found her own. Everything was better this way. "I... I..." She let out an empty-headed titter. "I'm just, like, happy to be of service."

On a dime, the intensity in Mel's gaze vanished. She smiled, and reached across to fondly pet Amara's head. "Of course you are," she purred, as her new

enforcer preened. “Now, over here. I want to enjoy the other half of my present.”

She guided Amara over to one side of the church storeroom, where her mothers had provided a full-length, free-standing mirror. Amara obediently took her place in front of it, staring vacantly at her own, naked reflection. Mel studied the reflection too, peering around one of Amara’s shoulders, and Amara could sense that her new owner was seeing a blank canvas, ready to be painted.

“Emma,” Mel called out thoughtfully. “Why don’t you tell me what you think?”

“Okay!”

Eagerly, Emma bounced to Amara’s opposite to look into the mirror. At once, her gaze sharpened. She was a bimbo, certainly, but her new career as an influencer had given her a surprisingly sharp instinct for fashion. She was every bit as focused as her new wife as she studied Amara’s body. “Hmm,” Emma mused. “What did you, like, have in mind?”

“You know what I like, sweetheart.” Emma let out a delighted squeal as Mel reached across to playfully slap and grope her ass through her slutty bridal gown.

“Totally!” Emma giggled in response. “But... I’m, like, not sure girly and ditzy is really her color?”

“Oh?” Mel asked, smiling indulgently.

“Hmm.” Emma pursed her plump, pink lips, then reached up to touch Amara’s dyed blue side-shave. “This really suits her, right? How about... punky and spunky?”

Mel grinned. “An enforcer needs a little attitude, right?”

“Attitude!” Emma giggled her agreement. “Exactly. I can for sure work with that.”

From then on, both she and Mel were a whirlwind of activity as they searched through the clothing racks all around the storeroom for pieces that aligned with their new vision. It came together little by little, after much lively discussion and plenty of having Amara try on this and that. Amara was kept in a pleasant haze as the newlyweds used her as a dress-up doll, recreating her personal style to suit their preferences. Her weak mind knew nothing but obedience, and her strong body existed only to please Mel Adams. What more could she ask for than for it to be adorned to her liking?

After a brief discussion, Mel and Emma elected to preserve Amara’s

strong preference for gym clothes and activewear. After all, they matched her body perfectly. As such, the first pieces of her new wardrobe were relatively pedestrian: a black sports bra and a pair of tight-fitting, black yoga pants.

Mel did pick out something pink and lacy for under the yoga pants, though. A little nod to her own tastes, and something only she would ever get to enjoy.

Following that, they took their time picking out the perfect top, comparing options and opinions as they held items of clothing before Amara's reflection. Eventually, they found their holy grail: a black muscle tee, emblazoned in neon pink with a word—a band name?—that Amara couldn't even read because of the huge, gothic, metal font it was scrawled in. It wasn't Amara's style. She could not possibly dislike anything Mel wanted to dress her up in, but that didn't mean it felt comfortable to her. Amara had always preferred brighter, bolder colors. It was more energetic, more her, and more welcoming to her regular fitness clients. And a metal band? It really wasn't her kind of music. However sporty, something about the outfit felt unmistakably foreign.

Or at least it did, until Mel reached into her head and took that feeling away from her.

"Strong body, weak mind," Mel reminded Amara, noticing, perhaps, some minute stiffness to her pose. As Amara once again slumped deep into trance, Mel used the lightest of touches to guide her empty eyes to her reflection in the mirror. "This is who you are, Amara. This is how you dress."

With that, it was true. Amara internalized her new wardrobe without a second thought. The girl in the mirror was beginning to take shape. A gothy, punky, Amazonian gym rat. That was exactly who Amara Rodriguez now was.

With the foundation laid down, it was time for accessories. Mel's mothers had not been sparing with those. Mel went searching through dressers and suitcases and soon returned with a matching pair of leather cuffs with short spikes set into them, one for each wrist. After that, she went looking through the racks of footwear for a pair of tall, black, stompy boots. Meanwhile, Emma was busy with Amara's makeup: dark eyeshadow, sharp eyeliner, bold brow pencil, and blue lipstick to match Amara's hair.

Still entranced, still watching the mirror, Amara was learning more and more about who she truly was. An alt girl. A punk. A girl with attitude. The outfit itself painted a picture, one Amara's mind was just as receptive to as any observer's would have been. It was at once familiar and strange. Her proud, muscular physique was still on full display, and her accessories—from the

boots, to the cuffs, to the chain necklace and spiky earrings Mel was busy adorning her with—would be easy to stow away in a locker whenever she needed to work out. But now, instead of welcoming and disarming, she looked fierce. Dark. Dangerous.

“Now she’s starting to look the part,” Mel noted, pleased. “A little out of my usual comfort zone, I admit. But something about her really does it for me.”

“Yeah!” Emma giggled. The two of them kept exchanging looks and smiles, caught up in their own, private wedding day afterparty. “Total baddie. She’s gonna be, like, perfect.”

“She is,” Mel agreed. She reached up and touched one of Amara’s ears. “What do you think about more piercings? Something industrial, maybe?”

“Oh, I can totally see it!” Emma rubbed her hands gleefully. “How about some tattoos, too?”

“Perhaps.” Mel rubbed her chin thoughtfully. “What did you have in mind?”

“Um...” Emma giggled vacantly. “I dunno! I figured you’d, like, come up with all the details and stuff.”

Mel giggled too. “Of course, my love.”

“For now, though...” Emma pursed her lips before smiling again. “Yeah, I think she’s just about done!”

“I agree.” Mel winked at her wife in the mirror. “At least, outside.” She turned her attention to Amara once again. “Strong body, weak mind. Sink for me.”

“Strong... body...” Amara yielded willingly to the command. She let it course through her, taking independent thought still further out of reach. “Weak... mind.”

“You serve me,” Mel said. It was not a question, nor even a command. It was simply the truth.

“Yes, mistress,” Amara replied, voice as empty as her head.

“You obey me.”

“Yes, mistress.”

“You are loyal to me, unfailingly.”

“Yes, mistress.”

“And,” Mel added, glancing across to Emma. “You are loyal to my wife.

Unfailingly.”

This was new. But Amara saw no difficulty in offering her loyalty to two masters. Not when they were in such close alignment. “Yes, mistress.

“You serve Emma. You obey Emma.”

“Yes, mistress.” As Mel spoke and Emma giggled in delight, Amara could feel every bit of the worshipful reverence she felt for Mel being transferred to her bride. It was an easy thing to carve into her pliant mind—both because her resistance to Mel had long since been erased, and because the two wives were already so perfectly one, it only made sense to serve them both equally.

“But above all,” Mel stressed, “you protect Emma. From whatever might endanger her.”

“Yes, mistress.”

“That’s the kind of right-hand woman I need,” Mel explained. “And the one you will be. Someone strong and protective. A woman with attitude, whenever it seems like someone might be a threat or a problem. Someone who can be as sweet as you ever were, but who projects the kind of energy that’ll make people think twice before messing with us. A little bit like... like a big, dumb sheepdog.”

Amara felt the weight of those words settle over her, infusing her with a new sense of self and purpose. Even in the mirror, it was visible in her bearing and on her face. Her pose shifted so that she stood with a broader stance, shoulders back, suggesting an easy, effortless confidence. Beneath trance’s blissful mask, the muscles around her mouth were beginning to arrange themselves into a daring, cocksure grin. She could even feel it weaving itself into her personality: the fierce loyalty that wedded her old spunk and charm with her new, overriding sense of protectiveness and purpose. With just a few offhand suggestions, she was made anew.

“And,” Mel added, swept up excitedly in the fantasy she was painting, “just like Lucy for my Mothers, when I need you to handle a problem or take care of someone for me, you’ll be...”

Unexpectedly, she trailed off. Amara, infinitely patient, waited for her to continue, but in the end, it was Emma who broke the silence.

“My love?” she ventured, concerned. “You OK?”

“Emma,” Mel asked quietly. “Am I doing the right thing?”

Emma tilted her head. “With, like, Amara’s new outfit?”

“With all of this,” Mel replied, brow weighed down by sudden doubt.

“Following in my parents’ footsteps, taking on Amara, becoming a hypnogarch. It’s... I don’t know. I still remember when this was the last thing I ever wanted.”

“Well, um...” Emma was frowning too, plainly struggling to figure out how best to comfort her wife. “What do you want now?”

A long moment’s silence followed. “I don’t know,” Mel confessed eventually. “This feels right, I think. I think I can do good like this. That’s what my parents always said: it’d be easier for my generation, and I could do things differently if I wanted to. Maybe they’re right. Maybe I can change things from the inside, with power like this. Reform things a little.”

“Oh!” Emma brightened. “Then it’s all good, right?”

“Right.” Mel smiled ruefully. “Except, I know what the old Emma would have said about that. You would have said that I was just kidding myself and that it was just an excuse to keep perpetuating the same old power and the same old system.”

“Oh.” Emma’s smile vanished. She giggled self-consciously. “That, um, doesn’t really sound like me.”

“Not anymore.” Mel sighed. “But the thing is, the old Emma would never have been in my shoes. Never would have had the opportunity I have now. What am I supposed to do, waste it? Say ‘no’ to all this, just because it’s a little ugly sometimes? What good would that do?”

“I... I dunno,” Emma admitted, battling to keep up with Mel’s mercurial train of thought. “So, um, if you’re gonna do good stuff, that’s, like, all that really matters, right?”

Mel shrugged. “I hope so. At the end of the day, that’s all I want. To make things better.” Her attention turned to Amara again. She reached up to brush her cheek with the back of her hand. “Am I making her better, Emma?”

“U-um...” Emma’s voice warbled uncertainly. It was clear from her face that the bimbo could not hope to wrap her head around the enormity of the ethical question Mel was posing. Not anymore. But it was also that she was trying as hard as she could, out of a desperate need to comfort her wife. Eventually she seemed to make up her mind, and reached across to squeeze Mel’s shoulder. “Yes,” Emma told her confidently. “You absolutely are. Because I’m, like, happy like this! And she will be too. And I don’t know if any of that other stuff even matters.”

Mel’s eyes widened slightly. At first, she seemed wary of the sheer simplicity of the argument—but after a moment, she eased into it, brushed her concerns aside, and allowed her face to settle into a relaxed, proud smile.

"You're right, my love," she conceded. "As always. Amara will be happy. Just like Vivienne Gilbert. Just like you. And just like anyone else I need to bend to my will, if that's what it takes to change things and make the world a better place."

Emma nodded, pleased and proud.

With that settled, Mel was free to assess Amara with eyes unclouded by doubt. "One last cherry on top," she declared, and took something she'd selected earlier out of her pocket in order to fasten it around Amara's neck. It was a chunky, black, leather collar, a match in style for the cuffs on Amara's arms, but with embossed text in the same color as the pink writing on her top. "Perfect."

The collar read simply: *Mel's*.

Mel took a moment to survey her handiwork—but only a moment. She soon slipped away from Amara and toward Emma, placing her hands on her bride's hips and pulling her in close. Emma squealed, delighted.

"Now that's out of the way," Mel cooed, "we're free to focus on what matters."

"Don't want to enjoy your new toy?" Emma giggled.

Mel shook her head firmly. "I want to enjoy you. My wife. You know, maybe my mothers had the right idea about something else, too. And I bet the reception is already winding down. So..."

She let her voice trail off amorously before suddenly pulling Emma over against the wall and into her arms. Within moments the two of them were lost in each other, and filling the storeroom with sounds of giggling, kissing, and more. Amara Rodriguez, still in a trance, was left staring at her own reflection in the mirror, ignored and forgotten, letting the sounds of newlywed lovemaking wash over her while her empty mind contemplated and absorbed the last few messages Mel had placed in it. After all, she had nothing else. No will of her own, and no dream except service.

But that was alright. She was going to be happy, and she was going to help make the world a better place. Mel had told her so.

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